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# Capitol digest: State revenue update and caucus coverage

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A roundup of legislative and Capitol news items of interest for Tuesday, Feb. 3 2016:

**ICN AIDS CAUCUS COVERAGE:** When Iowa became the focus of worldwide media attention on Feb. 1, the Iowa Communications Network, or ICN, provided fast, strong, reliable broadband to media that converged on the Capitol Complex in Des Moines to cover the first-in-the-nation Iowa precinct caucuses, according to a spokesman for the state-owned network.

During the weeks leading up to the caucuses, ICN coordinated multiple service requests from the Iowa Department of Administrative Services for temporary services at various locations, according to John Cahill. In addition to a tremendous amount of broadband, ICN provided NBC, ABC, CNN, Fox News and other media with Internet circuits for streaming video, updating social media and communicating back to their network offices.

ICN understands the importance of providing strong broadband with uninterrupted service during the caucuses when Iowa is in the spotlight, according to Ric Lumbard, ICN executive director.

"ICN worked diligently to ensure Iowans and the world could receive instant caucus news and results from the media that were stationed around the Capitol Complex," he said.

**STATE REVENUE UPDATE:** Tax collections flowing into the state treasury last month were 3.8 percent higher than in January 2015, but a Legislative Services Agency analyst said Wednesday the number is deceptive and month-to-month comparisons are "problematic."

LSA senior tax analyst Jeff Robinson said calendar and timing issues resulted in positive tax withholding and the figures for January but having the month end on a weekend had negative offsets. Robinson said the factors likely means the \$21.1 million increase in January receipts will be reduced in current month comparison when February revenue is calculated.

For the fiscal year to date, tax collections are up \$88 million, or 2.3 percent, above the July-through-January period one year ago. Robinson noted the 2.3 percent growth rate was below the 3.8 percent increase the state Revenue Estimating Conference set for the current fiscal year during its December meeting. Personal income tax collections are up 6.7 percent for the fiscal year, but slow sales/use tax growth and a 15.5 percent drop in corporate income tax receipts are placing a drag on collection numbers for fiscal 2016.

More than \$3.948 billion in state general fund receipts have been collected this fiscal year compared to \$3.86 billion during the same seven-month period in fiscal 2015, according the LSA monthly report.

**NEW JUDGE:** Gov. Terry Branstad on Wednesday appointed David N. May as judge to the 5C

Judicial District in Polk County, filling the vacancy created by the retirement of Judge Robert Hutchison.

"David May is an experienced trial attorney with an exceptionally bright legal mind and a strong work ethic," Branstad said in making the appointment.

May, 44, of Polk City, currently is in private practice. He also serves as a lecturer at the Annual Fire Investigation School for the Iowa Fire Service Training Bureau and has served as an instructor at the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

**HEATING COSTS:** Natural gas prices in Iowa have dropped while propane prices have stayed unchanged and home heating oil rose by a penny per gallon in the past week. The prices of natural gas dipped to \$2.03/MMbtu in the latest fuel price survey issued by the state Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship. Home-heating oil stood at \$146 a gallon while propane stood at \$1.01 per gallon statewide. On the motor fuels market, the price of regular unleaded gasoline in Iowa averaged \$1.72 a gallon, according to AAA. That was 5 cents a gallon lower than one week ago and down 29 cents from one year ago. The national average on Tuesday for regular unleaded gasoline was \$1.78, down 5 cents a gallon from last week. Retail diesel fuel prices in Iowa were 2 cents a gallon lower on the Tuesday report with a statewide average of \$1.90 compared to \$2.59 in Iowa a year ago.

**BYRNES OUT:** Rep. Josh Byrnes, R-Osage, announced Wednesday he will leave the Legislature to take a position as general manager of Osage Municipal Utilities. He will not seek re-election.

Byrnes, who is in his third term, chairs the House Transportation Committee and led the effort in 2015 to increase the motor fuel tax by a dime a gallon.

Byrnes has worked as a high school teacher, community college administrator and EMT.

**CMV SCREENING:** A Senate Human Resources subcommittee moved forward SF 2075 that would require all infants to be screened for cytomegalovirus, or CMV, a common virus that can cause hearing loss and other forms of developmental disability. According to the Iowa Department of Public Health, about 104 Iowa babies are affected each year.

Sen. Janet Petersen, D-Des Moines, sponsored the bill after learning about CMV from constituents. Newborns can be infected in the womb or become infected during birth or shortly after birth such as through breast-feeding.

Representatives of the health care community raised several questions about the bill, including concerns about cost and whether they would be borne by insurance and or Medicaid. Most are registered as undecided.

Sen. Mary Joe Wilhelm, D-Cresco, and Chaz Allen, D-Newton, signed off on the bill despite reservations. Sen. Mark Chelgren, R-Ottumwa, said he would wait for the bill "to mature."

**QUOTE OF THE DAY:** "You're making an assumption that if I fish in a farm pond that's all I fish, but I can only catch bullheads for so long," Rep. Norlin Mommsen, R-DeWitt, commenting on HF 2046, which would allow people to fish on farm ponds without a license.

— Compiled by the Des Moines Bureau

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